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ABSTRACT

An approach to teaching logical organization of ideas in English through paragraph writing is presented. The approach is designed for Japanese high school and college students, for whom native language writing strategies and objectives are different from those of English-speakers. Four overall goals of the process of paragraph writing include: (1) to teach the students basic sentence and paragraph skills; (2) to allow the student to become more aware of and to practice pre-writing and revision strategies; (3) to give students the opportunity to assimilate and improve the organizational skills necessary to write academic assignments; and (4) to foster self-confidence in students about their ability to write coherent academic prose. Four steps are followed for developing basic paragraph and organizational skills. They consist of: (1) analyzing a paragraph for elements and organization; (2) writing a one-paragraph essay following the model paragraph; (3) constructing a paragraph; and (4) writing and giving a short speech. Exercises and examples from one teacher's experience are included. (MSE)

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Title:

Teaching Logical Organization of Ideas in English

(This is a paper presented at The 86' JALT International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning at Hamamatsu Japan, November 22, 1986.)

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Teaching Logical Organization of Ideas in English

(This is a paper presented at The 86' JALT International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning at Hamamatsu Japan, November 22, 1986.)

Abstract:

This paper is about teaching Japanese high school and college students logical organization of ideas in English through paragraph writing. The goals of teaching paragraph writing are to teach the students basic paragraph skills and improve the organizational skills necessary to write coherent prose. The author has suggested four steps in teaching paragraph writing to Japanese students providing a variety of exercises. Since Japanese have writing strategies and objectives different from English strategies, teaching logical organization of ideas in English is of great importance.

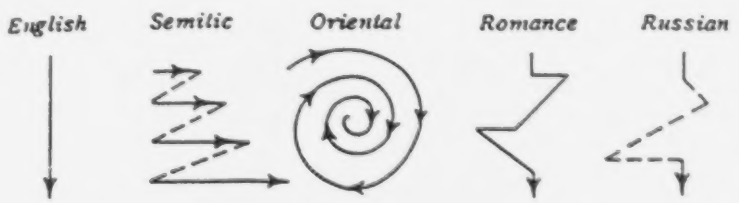
1. Introduction

In order to communicate smoothly with English speaking people, Japanese must know not only the language but also the logical organization of ideas. I am focusing on paragraph writing, for witing a good paragraph is a promising start to learn the logic of English, and it is one of the necessary elements for successful communication using English. If Japanese students studying English learn about paragraph writing, it will be a great help not only when they write English but also when they read, speak, and listen to English.

In this paper I will discuss some difficulties the Japanese students face in writing a good paragraph and also provide original materials effective for teaching paragraph writing to Japanese high school and college students.

2. Differences in developing logical organization between languages

There are differences between English ways of developing ideas and that of other languages. Kaplan (1966) says that while noting that not all English writers follow the same logic, he pointed out marked differences between native English writers and foreign-student writers by quoting extensively from theme papers. After investigating 129 Semitic languages, 318 Oriental languages, and 88 Romance languages, he classified the movements of various paragraphs into five patterns as follows:



Kaplan also states that at the unit of a sentence, a paper may seem to be good English, but the foreign student who has mastered the syntax of English may still write a bad paragraph or a bad paper unless he also masters the logic of

English.

3. Basics about a Paragraph

3.1 What is a composition ?

Huizenga, Snelling, and Francis (1986: Intro XIII) define a compositon as "a piece of writing about one central topic. It may consist of one or more paragraphs." If the central topic needs to be divided into several subtopics, each subtopic should be developed into a paragraph. A compositon of more than one paragraph usually has an introductory paragraph, transitional paragraph, and concluding paragraph.

3.2 What is a paragraph ?

A definition of a paragraph is "a group of related sentences which communicates one central idea." (Huizenga, Snelling, and Francis. 1986: Intro XIII) or "a group of sentences that work together to make clear one central idea." (Corbin, Blough, and Beek. 1965: 9)

A paragraph is usually made up of four to eight sentences but it may be shorter or longer according to the simplicity or complexity of the subject. As a whole, paragraphs can be divided into two big different types, the independent paragraph and the dependent paragraph. An independent paragraph is a single paragraph and an isolated unit. Dependent paragraphs are related to each other and exist as portions of a large whole.

Iwashita (1984) divides paragraphs into nine different types: the topic paragraph, the need paragraph, the information-giving paragraph, the discussion paragraph, the key paragraph, the proof paragraph, the example paragraph, the evidence paragraph and the summary paragraph. He states that if you can understand the " topic paragraph" and the " key paragraph," you can grasp the outline of the essay.

3.3 How does a paragraph begin, progress, and hold together.

A paragraph usually begins with a general statement which is called a topic sentence. A topic sentence tells what the main idea of the paragraph is about and limits the kind of information that should be included in the paragraph.

The topic sentence is followed by supporting details. Supporting details are the sentences that explain the topic sentence. They give more information about the main idea.

The ideas in a paragraph are usually connected with connectors or transitions. They show the relationship between the ideas. Transitions are used also between paragraphs.

4. The overall goals of the process of paragraph writing

There are many processes involved in composition. These processes can be classified into three categories, pre-writing, writing, and re-writing. Within these categories, the art of composing and producing a paragraph consists of a complex of steps. Because of this complexity, clear goals of paragraph writing should be given first. The overall goals of the process of paragraph writing by Reid and Lindstrom (1985: Intro X-XI) are as follows:

1. To teach the students basic sentence and paragraph skills.
2. To allow the students to become more aware of and to practice pre-writing and revision strategies.
3. To give students the opportunity to assimilate and improve the organizational skills necessary to write academic assignments.
4. To foster self-confidence in students about their ability to write coherent academic prose.

5. Four steps in teaching paragraph writing

The following is a set of newly suggested steps in teaching paragraph writing to Japanese students. The final step, a short speech, is the reading of a free writing composition in front of the class.

1. Analyzing a paragraph
2. Writing a one paragraph essay following the model paragraph
3. Construction of a paragraph
4. Writing and giving a short speech

5.1 Analyzing a paragraph

Takahashi (1987:37) says that the elements involved to analyze a paragraph are as follows:

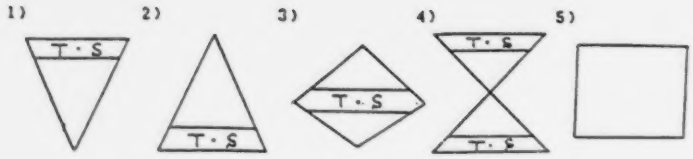
1. Understanding of the topic
2. Understanding of the topic sentence
3. Distinction between the topic sentence and specific details
4. Unity
5. Coherence

I have restructured Takahashi's elements into the following order:

1. Topic sentence and supporting details
2. Ways of developing main ideas
3. Ways of organizing a paragraph
4. Unity
5. Coherence

5.1.1 Topic sentence and supporting details

Hashimoto (1979) remarks that there are three patterns of the position of the topic sentence; (1) topic sentence first, (2) topic sentence in the middle, and (3) topic sentence last. Suzuki, Hagiwara, and Steel (1969) adds two additional patterns to this, which are (4) topic sentence first and last, and (5) without any topic sentence. All five patterns are illustrated as follows;



Reid and Lindstrom (1985) say as follows about a topic sentence:

1. It tells what the paragraph will be about.
2. It states the main idea of the paragraph.
3. It introduces the reader to the main idea in the paragraph.
4. It focuses and directs the paragraph.
5. It is the most general sentence in the paragraph.
6. It is the most important sentence in the paragraph.

The paragraph usually begins with the topic sentence. Chaplin (1970:8) says, "whenever possible, the topic sentence should be placed at the beginning of a paragraph. In that pattern, it is a very helpful guide to both the writer and the reader."

The topic sentence is followed by supporting details. The following exercises are for practice in distinguishing the topic sentence from supporting details.

Exercise 1

Read the following paragraph and find the topic sentence and the supporting details.

"Lazy" is really the word for my brother. On weekends he sleeps till noon. He never does any work around the house. He just sits and watches TV. He expects us all to wait on him.

1. topic sentence:_____

   supporting details sentences:

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

5. _____

Exercise 2

Read the following paragraph and answer the questions below.

Sending a package from the U.S. is not difficult if you follow these simple instructions. First, wrap your package well. Print the receiver's address in the middle of the package and your address in the upper left-hand corner. Then go to the post office. Go up to one of the windows, and give your package to the clerk. You should tell the clerk whether you want it to go first, third, or fourth class (second class is used only for newspapers and periodicals) and if you want to insure it. Finally, pay your money.

1. What is the topic sentence ?
2. Choose five supporting details sentences in chronological order.

5.1.2 Ways of developing main ideas

There are several ways of developing main ideas. Hashimoto (1979) has mentioned five ways. They are (1) examples and typical instances, (2) comparison and/or contrast, (3) reasons, (4) classification, and (5) definition. Exercise 3 is for practice in analyzing a paragraph which gives reasons.

Exercise 3

Read the following paragraph and answer the questions below.

Tokyo is the world's most expensive city. A United Nations report published in June 1978 shows that it costs U.N. officials 62 per cent more money to live in Tokyo than to live in New York City. Other workers from abroad like businessmen, foreign correspondents, and diplomats concur with the U.N. report: Tokyo is the costliest city on earth. For one reason, renting a house or an apartment is very (costly). A two-bedroom apartment in New York may rent for ($600-900) a month, while in Tokyo it is common to pay $2000 or ¥400,000, for a two-bedroom western style apartment. The cost of food in supermarkets and in restaurants is

usually twice as much as it is in the United States. The price of clothes can be three times as high as it is in the States and twice as much as in Europe. [3]

1. How many reasons are given in the paragraph to support the idea that Tokyo is the world's most expensive city?
2. What are the two details which support the topic sentence?

5.1.3 Ways of organizing a paragraph

Organizational skill is necessary if we want to write a good paragraph. Hashimoto (1979) suggests seven organizational themes: (1) time order, (2) space order, (3) cause-effect relationships, (4) order of importance, (5) order of difficulty, (6) order of size, and (7) order of familiarity. The following exercise is for practice in re-arranging according to time order.

Exercise 4

The following sentences are not logically ordered . Re-arrange them in an appropriate order.

( ) a. Finally, thank your host or hostess for the dinner when you leave.
( ) b. Making a good impression at an American dinner party is not difficult if you follow these instructions.
( ) c. After you finish eating, you should not stay more than a few hours.
( ) d. First, you should buy a small gift such as flowers, candy, or wine for your host or hostess.
( ) e. Next, during dinner, be sure to compliment your host or hostess on the meal.
( ) f. Second, arrive on time.
( ) g. If the dinner engagement is for 7:00, don't arrive after 7:15 without telephoning. [4]

5.1.4 Unity

As we mentioned before, a paragraph is a group of sentences about a single idea. There should be only one topic and one topic sentence in one paragraph. If all the sentences in one paragraph are related to one idea, the paragraph is unified. Any sentence that does not support the topic sentence is irrelevant and should be removed from the paragraph.

The paragraph in the next exercise contains one irrelevant sentence. It is for practice in eliminating an irrelevant sentence to ensure a paragraph unity.

Exercise 5

In the paragraph below, one sentence is irrelevant. Draw a line through that sentence.

Acapulco is traditionally the best city in Mexico for vacations. The tourist can have fun all day long in this city. In the morning he can go to the beach and swim in the ocean. In the afternoon there are many museums and shops to keep the visitor busy. Bolivia also has some nice cities to visit. In the evenings, the vacationer can enjoy the many restaurants, theaters, and discos in Acapulco. After partying and dancing until dawn, the visitor can go to a beautiful hotel for a long rest. [5]

5.1.5 Coherence

Even when a paragraph is unified, the paragraph sometimes still seems rough. In these cases, we must use coherence devices to make the paragraph smoother. Coherence in writing means that one thought is connected to one that comes before it. One way to achieve coherence is with the use of connectors or transitions. The following exercise is for practice in inserting appropriate transitions to make the paragraph coherent.

Exercise 6

The following cause-effect paragraph is poorly written because it lacks transitions. It would be much easier to understand if transitions were used between

its major points. Decide where each major supporting statement begins, and insert appropriate transitions.

There are three reasons Mr. Tucker was fired from his job. He was often absent from work. He missed thirty working days last year. His personality was a problem. He was nasty to other employees and to the customers. His performance on the job was poor. He did not follow the boss' instructions, and he rarely completed assignments. [6]

5.2 Writing a one paragraph essay following the model paragraph

The next step after analyzing a paragraph is writing a one paragraph essay. Students read the well-written model paragraph, and then write their essay referring to the model.

Exercise 7

Read the following paragraph and answer the questions below.

When you wake up hungry in the middle of the night, make yourself a Dagwood "special." The Dagwood "special" is a fantastic sandwich named for the comic strip character Dagwood Bumstead, husband of Blondie, who fixes himself such a sandwich at odd times of the day or night. For ingredients use whatever you find edible. Start with bread and next add in layers lettuce and tomatoes, or cucumbers, or both, slices of ham and cheese, slices of boiled egg, perhaps some thinly sliced white fish or tuna, maybe a couple of pieces of fresh ginger or a touch of hot mustard. Put another piece of bread on top. Next, open your mouth very wide and take the first bite. If the Dagwood Sandwich gives you nightmares, next time switch to "Cup Noodle." [7]

Question: Using the preceding model paragraph as a guide, choose one topic from below and write a one paragaraph essay ordering the sentences chronologically.

1. Making an Origami
2. Cooking Tempura

3. Starting my car

5.3 Construction of a paragraph

In this stage, students construct a paragraph. Reid and Lindstrom (1985) states the process for writing a paragraph as follows:

1. Choose a subject you know about and are interested in; be sure you want to communicate this information to an audience.
2. Choose a specific audience; decide what that audience probably already knows about your subject and what else they might like to know about it.
3. Narrow the subject to a topic that you can write a paragraph about for your specific audience.
4. Gather information about the topic.
5. Construct a topic sentence that contains controlling ideas that need to be explained, defined, and/or illustrated.
6. Ask questions about the topic sentence that need to be answered in the paragraph that follows.
7. Answer those questions with facts, examples, physical description, and/or personal experience.
8. Write a rough draft of the paragraph.
9. Re-read the paragraph; make sure the topic sentence gives a clear idea of the paragraph that follows. Modify the topic sentence if necessary.
10. Proofread the paragraph carefully; correct grammatical and mechanical errors.

Yanatori (1985) suggests steps in paragraph writing as follows:

1. Choose a topic.
2. Narrow the topic.
3. State your purpose.
4. Write a topic sentence.
5. List all the details you can think of.
6. Select the details supporting the central idea.

7. Make a sentence outline.
8. Test the outline.
9. Write a first draft.
10. Leave your first draft untouched for a while.
11. Revise and edit your first draft.
12. Recopy, proofread and hand in your final copy.

The steps in paragraph writing which are mentioned in exercise 8 below are a simplified form of Reid and Lindstorm's and Yanatori's steps, suggested for the Japanese high school and college students.

Exercise 8

Construct a paragraph according to the following eight steps.

1. Choose a subject.
2. Select an audience.
3. Narrow the subject to a topic.
4. Write a topic sentence.
5. List related details and select details which best support the topic.
6. Write a first draft.
7. Revise and edit first draft.
8. Proofread.

5.4 Writing and giving a short speech

As I mentioned before, this is the reading of a free writing composition in front of the class. Free writing composition is defined by Okihara (1985:171) as "a means of communication with the written language, expressing the writer's own ideas, feelings, and experiences in one or more paragraphs, following the given or created theme without any control over the style."

Ushiro (1979) insists on paying attention to practicing paragraph writing, not in writing individual sentences. Takahashi (1987) says that paragraph writing is an effective teaching method as a transitional measure leading to free

writing. I agree with both Ushiro's opinion and Takahashi's opinion about the merits of paragraph writing.

About paragraph writing Bailey, Powell and Shuttleworth (1979:3) says that "one obvious advantage is that they are short enough to allow you to spend your study time writing a really good one. Yet they are long enough for you to practice and demonstrate the fundamentals of writing. A final advantage is that what you learn about one-paragraph essays transfers nicely to long themes and research papers."

The students can reach the final stage, which is composing a free writing essay through studing paragraph writing. At this stage, it is effective to let students read their composition in front of the class. The students who are listening should think about the following questions:

1. Is the description complete or has the writer left out a part?
2. Is there anything in the composition that is not completely clear to you?
3. Is there a logical organization evident in the speech?

If the size of the class is too large, the teacher can divide the students into three or four groups and talk with the partner about these questions and try to agree on improvements each students can make. Since many Japanese are not used to speaking English in front of others, this final step of giving a short speech is very important.

The following composition was written and read in front of the class by an 11th grader at Kanagawa Prefectual Yokosuka High School in Yokosuka Japan. It was written after I had taught the students about paragraph writing according to my four teaching steps. The sentences are the original text without any correction.

Student A:

"The Difference between American Family and Japanese Family"

In American home, parents and children have their own spaces. One of the reasons is that houses in America are bigger than those in Japan. Children have their own living rooms separated from parents' one. Children seldom or never

enter their parents' living room because parents' room are different world from childrens'. In some American families, children do not have a meal at the same table with their parents.

In Japanese standard families, childrens' spaces are not separated from parents' spaces except their own rooms. Parents and children have a meal and relax together. They also spent their time together on holidays because children are the center of their families.

Americans like parties. Some parents go to parties every weekend. Children are never invited to parties for adults. So parents hire baby-sitters to take care of them. Parents can enjoy their own time free from children.

In Japan, mothers always take care of their children until they grow up. As many Japanese mothers are homemakers, children are everything for them. However, it seems this trend is changing because mothers with jobs are increasing recently.

Accrding to the book written by Mr. Hattori, Americans think that everyone has their own life, fathers', mothers' and childrens'. So children in America become independent from parents in earilier age than Japanese. In Japan, many grown-up children cannot separate from their parents mentally.

Student B:

"What should we learn from America"

Between America and Japan, there are a lot of differences. The American individualism and the Japanese grouplism is one of them. In this report I'd like to tell you what we, Japanese, should learn from the American individualism, with some example.

The first thing is that we should not unite too much. We have many groups at school, at an area where we live, and at society. And we have been taught to believe that it is almost the first condition to be in harmony with everyone from the childhood. At school we have groups to study, to clean, to play, and so on. And we have to make friends with everyone in these groups. So when one folls out or quarrels with others, he is scolded by a teacher or is left out in the

cold. Because of we, Japanese, unite too much, we don't want to be alone and we fear to say something which others become in bad humor, so after all we become passive. But in America, to be in harmony with everyone isn't thought to be so important. One tells one's opinion freely, actively, and majestically. This is a thing Japanese should learn from American.

How about "a family" which is the basic group? Another thing which Japanese should learn is not to spoil their children. In Japanese families, the parents, especially mother, spoil their children. For example, they are convinced that their own child is the best and they fulfill all the children's wish. Some of them even go along with their children to take an entrance examination for a school. But American parents don't do so. I remember when I was in Hawaii, I went to a kindergarten there with a quarter in my hand every morning, and at noon I paid it for lunch at an entrance to a lunchroom and ate something I want. In Japan, the little children going to kindergarten don't have much money, so they ask their parents when they want something. And in America, the child cannot have money without any work, but in Japan they have an allowance even they don't work. Because of these things, the children is brought up indulgently, and become adults who can't do anything alone.

But I think American leave their children alone too much. American parents have likes and dislikes about their own children. For example, father loves his daughter but don't like his son. If I am in such conditions, I wouldn't be happy. I am confident of it that a family is different from any other groups.

These are only a little for Japan. We have to know more about America, and I want to know more about Japan, too.

In spite of grammatical problems, these examples do demonstrate the sence of coherence and unity as well as the logical organization in paragraphs, emphasized in my instruction.

6. Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with teaching logical organization of ideas in English, focusing on paragraph writing. A new proposal for teaching paragraph writing was presented with a variety of exercises. Since Japanese logic is different from English logic, teaching English logic through paragraph writing is of great importance.

Notes

1 Kanako Takahashi. "Improved High School English ⅡC Teaching with Emphasis on Paragraph Writing." The IRLT Bulletin. The Institute for Research in Language Teaching, Vol.1, 1987, 40-41.

2 Jann Huizenga, Courtenay Meade Snellings, and Gladys Berro Francis. Basic Composition for ESL — An Expository Workbook. Scott, Foresman and Company, 1986, 4.

3 Mitsuo Hashimoto. A Guide to Reading and Writing. Asahi Press, 1979, 26.

4 Huizenga, Snellings, and Francis, op. cit., 2.

5 Joy M. Reid, and Margaret Lindstrom. The Process of Paragraph Writing. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985, 82-83.

6 Ibid, 86-86.

7 Hashimoto, op. cit., 49.

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